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SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND HIS MISSION

by

SWAMI RAMAKRISHNANANDA

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THE AUTHOR

Swami Vivekananda wanted to have the name RAMAKRISHNANANDA *(the one who enjoys bliss in Ramakrishna)* for himself. But finding that Sashi Maharaj, as Ramakrishnananda was more familiarly known, had better claims to it, he relinquished his wish. This explains how SWAMI RAMAKRISHNANANDA was the one best fitted to speak of the Master. Of the Master's Mission also he could speak with immense authority and conviction. Sashi Maharaj was not only the founder of the Mission in South India, but in a sense the founder of the entire Mission. For it was he who served the monastery in its early childhood as its Mother and took religious care of the remains of the Master. Hence nobody else can speak with better authenticity and wealth of feeling about the Master's great Mission.

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SRI
RAMAKRISHNA AND HIS MISSION

BY

SWAMI RAMAKRISHNANANDA

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SRI RAMAKRISHNA MATH

MYLAPORE, MADRAS.

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THE PRESIDENT
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PREFACE

The following lecture was delivered by Sri Swami Ramakrishnananda 46 years ago during one of the birth-day anniversaries of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna celebrated at the Ice House on the South Beach road of the city of Madras. At that time the great Swami Vivekananda was in the West preaching the Gospel of his beloved Master. Swami Ramakrishnananda, has condensed in this short lecture many facts in connection with the life of his great Guru Sri Ramakrishna. This is a reprint of the book published in 1910. We hope the public will be benefited by this short discourse.

MYLAPORE
7th April, 1946

PUBLISHERS

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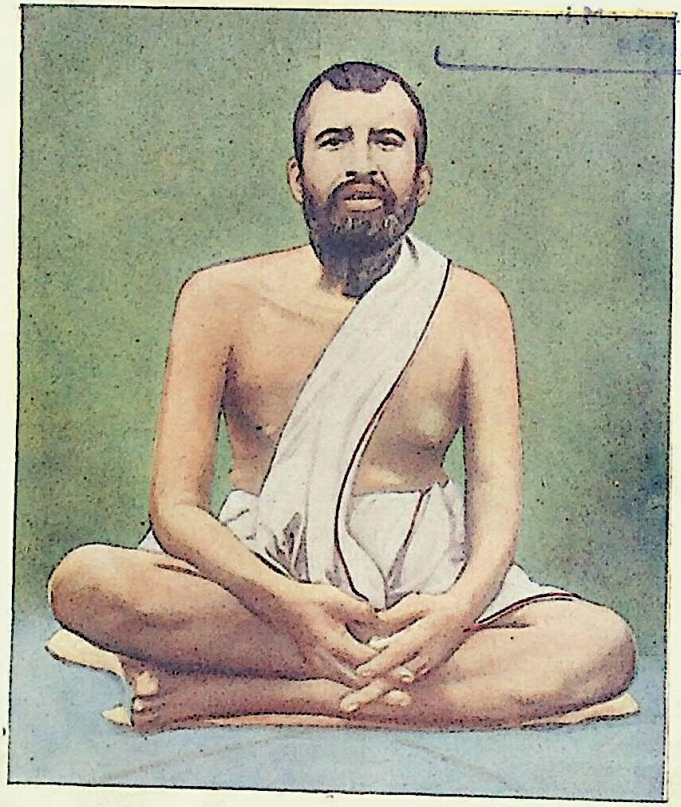

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SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND HIS MISSION

THE CHILD of Nature, fashioned by God's own hand, as it were, like Adam before his fall, Sri Ramakrishna, incomparably combined in himself the sweetly amiable, and divinely naive nature of Sri Rama, with the keen sagacity and profound wisdom of Sri Krishna. He began his all-purifying, all-gracious and all-comforting godly career, more than a decade and a half before the middle of the nineteenth century (1836), carrying with him the holy mission of universal love and sympathy, as well as peace and blessings for all humanity. Born of an orthodox Brahmin family, in a certain wayside village of Bengal named Sri Kamarpukur, bred by a father who was extremely rigid in all his pious observances and scrupulously particular about his high caste, it would have been but natural for him to turn out to be a religious aristocrat; but, as "the child is father of the man", the future teacher of universal tolerance, sympathy and love showed as a boy all these godly characteristics more than those which were transmitted to him through heredity.

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He was the leader of a band of little playmates who were of many castes, from the highest to the lowest, with all of whom he used to go to the neighbouring mango grove covering a large tract of land only about a furlong and a half from his house, and there like the cowherd boys of Sri Brindabanam, they played their innocent plays of childhood, when all caste distinctions being unknown, they felt themselves as the different limbs of one body, of which Gadadhara (Sri Ramakrishna's name in boyhood) was the head and heart.

Let us try to have some glimpses of this singular individual when he was a child. That childhood is extremely impressionable and perfectly retentive in nature, is best borne out by the fact that during the first two or three years of its life the little child retains almost a whole language in its memory and the impressions which it then receives are its life-long companions. Moreover, being filled with an exuberance of vigour and life, it imbues the whole universe also with that vitality, and thus lives and moves amidst an environment of living and conscious entities, unlike its grown-up self to which the world becomes partly animate and partly inanimate, and hence more prosaic. How a dry leaf, fluttering and moving from one place to another in a breeze

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sometimes gets a scolding from such little cherubs for not keeping quiet and behaving properly; how sometimes, one of those little angels, bestriding a stick regards it as a real horse, and such is the strength of his imagination that he finds even more pleasure in riding on it than a thoroughbred equestrian finds in riding his actual horse; he will tend it with all the zeal of a horseman, now taking it to the pond to make it drink water feeling it to be thirsty, or giving it fodder thinking it to be hungry, sometimes petting and caressing it or sometimes whipping it to bring it to order; these are facts very well known to all of us. The child moves in the world of reality. To it everything is serious. What we regard as toys and trifles, to it are the most serious affairs. Human life begins with such seriousness. The child is always happy, because the damping and debasing spirit of '*Nil admirari*' has not yet taken possession of its infant soul and it has not learned to regard anything as trifling and insignificant. It can thus be pleased with those things which appear to us to be most commonplace and uninteresting. How happy is that period of our life! Conscious of its weakness, it is naturally prone to ask help from others, and since everything is real and living to it, it asks help from all, animate

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or inanimate, friend or foe, high or low, good or bad, such distinctions not yet having taken possession of its universally sympathetic soul. As it has not yet tasted the fruit of the tree of knowledge, for Satan has not yet succeeded in tempting this Divine Adam or Eve, it directly communicates with God every moment of its life and draws all its inspiration from that universal source. Can such a holy being be anything short of an angel? Thus it is always merged in the Bliss Divine and becomes a source of pleasure even to those who merely glance at it.

Such is childhood. And the child of whom we are going to have some glimpses had those divine characteristics in an extraordinary degree as we are shortly to learn from the incidents connected with this portion of his life.

Bengal, from very ancient days, has been the home of strolling players, who go to play from village to village, if only a moderate sum is paid to them and whose themes are always connected with some of the incidents mentioned either in Ramayana, Mahabharata or any of the eighteen Puranas. Music is the principal attraction in all these theatrical performances. In dramatic representations, and pantomimic shows, they only take the second place.

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However, these latter have the greatest charm for the young generations. Thus it is clear that through the performances of these strolling players, which are couched in the most popular language, young and old, although they may be illiterate, get a fair knowledge of all the holy anecdotes of their scriptures. Every village boy is acquainted with the lives of Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, and the five Pandavas. The managers of these theatres themselves take the leading parts in the performances, and when some of them happen to be real devotees, the effect which they create in the minds of their audience leaves a lasting impression. Such people are, therefore, very popular and their influence on the naturally impressionable and highly imaginative minds of young boys, is also very great. As long as the performance lasts the juvenile hearers live in real Brindabanam, Ayodhya, Indraprastha, or Hastinapura. They carry the impressions, thus produced, through their life. Young Ramakrishna always used to be present whenever any such performance took place either in his village or any neighbouring one. Along with his highly imaginative and impressionable nature, he had a very strong and retentive memory, so it was but natural for him to retain whole pieces in his memory.

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The sun was shining brilliantly upon a grazing herd of cattle totally unmindful of the beautiful scenery around that was resounding with the shrill and sweet voices of two rival cuckoos, and sweetly perfumed by the fresh-blown mango-flowers from the neighbouring grove. A group of merry little boys was to be seen eating luncheon beneath one of these big and shady trees with spreading boughs. Some of them were dancing, some hallooing, and some playfully robbing the luncheon of others, to be robbed in their turn, and thus the whole scene appeared like a perfect Arcadia. The boys were of all castes, and amongst them was Sri Ramakrishna, giving them a beautiful song. Suddenly he stopped and asked his companions to perform the play which they had lately heard in the neighbouring village, representing the feelings of the cowherd girls when they were separated from Sri Krishna who was then living in Mathura. The party at once consented. Young Ramakrishna became Radha, and others took the parts of her attendant maids, one of whom was called Brinda. Radha, in the anguish of separation from her Beloved, was restless and her attendants feared that it might cost her life even ; so they deputed Brinda to go to Sri Krishna and tell him about the wretched plight to which

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she had been reduced. Before starting, Brinda asked Radha what she had to tell Sri Krishna and the latter not being able to tell anything, simply uttered the name of her lover, and fell into a swoon. At this stage the theatre suddenly broke up, for Sri Ramakrishna actually fell down senseless, tears trickling from his eyes and indistinct names of Sri Krishna coming out from his lips, till that also ceased.

As has been pointed out, this child had an extraordinarily impressionable nature, and when he was playing the part of Radha, he was so much impressed with the sentiment of love towards Sri Krishna, and felt the pang of separation so keenly, that he actually forgot it to be a mere play. He was living in real Brindabana, in the capacity of real Radha and thus how could he live for a moment without his beloved? The surrounding scenery too contributed much to waft him up to that blessed land where Nature always sits as a beautiful queen upon her verdant throne of eternal spring. His poetic turn of mind was so much impressed with the beautiful representations of Sri Brindabana, and the melting incidents connected therewith, made by the strolling players, and rural narrators of Puranic stories, that he lived, moved,

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and had his being, as it were, in that blessed land the greatest part of his life, just as John Bunyan is said to have been constantly living and moving in an apocalyptical atmosphere. The lightest suggestion could at once bring out the hidden fire and then he would forget where he was, entirely breathing at that moment the healthy and hilarious atmosphere of rural Brindaban. In most cases, this forgetfulness amounted to total unconsciousness of the environments, and the result was that he would fall down in a swoon. Thus people took him to be subject to epileptic fits, not being able to comprehend the profundity of his mind.

Unmindful in great measure of the world around, it was natural for him to have a liking for Sanyasins, who are similarly unconcerned with their surroundings. Once his mother presented him with a new cloth, and dressing himself in that, he went to pay his respects to the Sadhus, who on their way to Jagannath, had that day become the guests of the rich landlords of the place, the Laha family. Seeing them attired in small strips of cloth, he had also a fancy to dress himself in that fashion, so he tore his new cloth into pieces and selected two out of them. Attiring himself with them, he appeared before his mother, asking her to see how he had

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become a Sanyasin. Of course the mother was very much annoyed at this, as no mother ever wants to imagine her darling going away from her to the hills and jungles to lead a precarious life by begging from door to door. He was rebuked for this rash behaviour, and then coaxed and caressed by her with redoubled fondness and fervour.

As he was very amiable and beautiful to look at in his childhood, he was a darling to the fair sex of almost all the families of the village. They loved to entertain him with nice dainties whenever he used to make his appearance before any of them. Even some wealthy old pious men, such as Mr. Manick Bannerji and Mr. Dhamadas Laha, regarded him as a divine being, because of his natural love towards God, which indeed was much more than was to be expected in so young a child. People of his own family looked upon him with some regard, which in modern language may be styled as superstitious, because with his birth, poverty left the family which enjoyed competency ever afterwards.

Sri Ramakrishna was now five years of age. His father wanted to send him to the village school, kept by a pedagogue. Accordingly he was admitted there. Within a very short time he made friends with all his school fellows with whom, after

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the close of the school he used to play and sing with his sweet voice those songs which he had learned from the strolling players, and thus he attracted their hearts towards him. They always loved to hear him sing, and used to perform together some pieces they had lately heard. They indeed were very happy in having Sri Gadadhara as their companion. When, in a few days, it was known by all his schoolmates that he could sing and recite well, the news also reached the pedagogue's ear who one day after the end of the school hours asked him to sing. He did so, and it was so charming, that every day thereafter the teacher would not leave him without hearing a song or two from his sweet voice. Thus he became the darling of his master who never scolded him for being unmindful of his lessons. His literary attainments in consequence extended to a child's primer only and his mathematical knowledge only to simple addition! The first primer in village schools, before the introduction of modern system, was called Sisubodha, in which, after learning the alphabet, the boy was made to read the story of charitable Karna, the life of Prahlada etc., written all in poetry. Prose writing in Bengal is a later introduction, first brought into vogue by Christian

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missionaries. Nowadays Bengal has a very grand literature in prose, but sixty years back prose was not so highly honoured as now, and people in the villages stuck to the old style, even though in cities like Calcutta primers in prose were used for the boys according to the English method. Gadadhara had a great fancy for the life of the boy devotee Prahlada, and he would read it with great fervour before an appreciative audience often and often. There was in the village a person, named Madhoo, a weaver by caste, who loved to hear Gadadhara read about Prahlada: so after the close of his school Madhoo used to take him to his own house and make him read the life, for the edification of himself and many illiterate men and women, who used to collect round the young reader whenever he opened his book there. He was seven years of age at the time.

The father now left this world, leaving the charge of the family upon Ramakumar, his eldest child. A year or two passed away, then the time came for Gadadhara to be invested with the holy thread, and initiated into the mysteries of the religion of a Brahmana. The boy should choose a lady of whom he should beg first as his God-mother, that being the custom. To choose her

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from the Brahmana caste is the duty of a respectable Brahmin boy especially in the case of Gadadhara, as his family was known to be the most orthodox. But Gadadhara preferred to choose a pious blacksmith's widow, named Dhani, as his God-mother, at which every member of his family protested. But the young boy would have his own way, for his universal nature revolted against the idea of looking down upon a really pious, and honest lady, simply because she was of low caste, and regarding every Brahmana as an incarnation of piety and purity, although he might behave even worse than a Pariah. His appreciative nature was always ready to recognise true merit wherever it was to be found and so is it strange that he should have a great liking to give precedence in offering *bhiksha* to this pious lady ? People are everywhere caste-ridden, not only here in India, but all over the world, the difference being that here caste is sanctioned by religion, and in other lands it is regulated by the natural likings and dislikings of man, who always regards leniently the misdoings of relatives and the rich, and partly by social customs. Often times the real merit is overlooked, because the man or the woman happens to be born of a low caste, although in the long run, goodness

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triumphs, as is evinced by the Brahmana's worshipping the Pariah saints here in South India. It is clear nevertheless that the caste-ridden men of the world are always very slow to recognise merit in a man of lower caste ; but true and sterling merit will shine of itself, in spite of its having been overlooked at first. A broad and universal heart like that of Sri Ramakrishna, however, could not help recognising goodness wherever it was found. So although his relatives and friends all combined against his choosing Dhani as his God-mother, he was inexorable. He shut himself up in a room and did not take his meal almost for a whole day, till his second brother, Rameswara, promised that he should have his will, even to the detriment of the prestige of the family which had been enjoying the unsullied reputation of being the purest and most orthodox family of the place. Sri Ramakrishna was satisfied, and came out of his closet. He was invested with his holy thread and Dhani became his God-mother.

During funeral ceremonies, it is a custom in Bengal to invite together the learned men of the surrounding places in a meeting hall to hold discussions on religious subjects. Once when such a meeting was held in the mansions of the Laha

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family Sri Gadadhara, like young Jesus, discussed with the wise men in such a way, that they all admired and blessed him saying, "This extraordinary child will turn out to be an extraordinary man hereafter." So he was looked upon as a precocious and promising young boy by almost all the people of the village, some of whom used to regard him as more than human. One illiterate shell cutter, by name Chinnu (Srinivasa), sometimes used to take him to a solitary place to worship him with flowers and other offerings, such as, sweet-meats, &c., and the simple man actually used to weep before him in true devotion, finding in him, as it were, his ideal God! By this we can understand the influence which he unconsciously used to exercise around him even in his boyhood.

Among his several boyish pastimes I will mention here two more. He was a very good artist, and could form such nice images out of clay, that they actually fetched him money when exhibited in the market. He used to spend that money in entertaining his poor playmates. That his natural gift in this direction was not of a common kind may be easily understood by the fact that even the veteran painters, clay-moulders and other artists

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used to take his opinion about the correctness of their paintings and images.

He had a great imitative power and could copy every movement of any man or woman. When he used to attire himself in a female dress, none could detect him. Even his own girl-playmates could not recognize him when, disguised as one of them, he would come to talk with them. How wonderingly they would look at him when he would reveal his true self to them! He used to enjoy the fun very much. In this way he endeared himself to all men and women.

We have already said that his literary attainments were of a very rudimentary character. When he was seventeen years of age, *i.e.*, in the year 1853, he copied a portion of the Yuddhakanda of the Bengali Ramayanam written by Krittibasa, wherein the date of its completion has been mentioned, which is the 19th of Asada of the Sana, 1256. The copy is being carefully preserved in the Belur monastery (near Calcutta) which is now under the presidency of Swamy Brahmanandaji. It is written neatly in the round-hand of a boy, without much care being paid to the correctness of the orthography. By this even a superficial observer can judge of his literary merits.

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During this period of his life he used to learn wrestling, and with his supple limbs he could assume any posture he liked to the astonishment of the by-standers. He could easily take most of the eighty kinds of postures which the Hathayogis struggle and practise so much to assume.

He was ninteen years of age when his brother Ramakumar, who was a profound Sanskrit scholar and who had a *tol* or free school in Jhamapukur of Calcutta, wrote a letter to him from the metropolis asking him to come over there. Although Ramakumar was poor, he did not take any fee from his students, as it is regarded by all the orthodox scholars of the old school a sin to sell knowledge.

From what has been already said, it is clear that Sri Ramakrishna was little indebted, if at all, to any human being for his education. His mental development came naturally ; and if any one could claim to have been his teacher, it was Nature herself. He was a minute observer of human nature. Mixing with all classes of people, he knew the characteristics of all, keeping his own individuality intact. This wide experience was useful to him in his latter days by supplying him with ample materials for his ever-appealing, impressive and beautiful parables, illustrations and sayings. The

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world in which he lived was always beautiful like Sri Brinda, for it reflected his own pure heart wherein the Divine shepherd made his permanent residence. So his coming away from Kamarpukur to Calcutta may be compared to Sri Krishna's departure from Gokula to Mathura. When his brother wrote him to come to Calcutta, he had a two-fold motive, one to give him some Sanskrit education, which he had been altogether neglecting, and the other, to make him a useful member of the family by finding an appointment for him. Sri Ramakrishna always respected his eldest brother, and so on the receipt of the letter, he started for Calcutta where altogether a new scene and a new field of action was opened to him. He came out of the lap of Nature, to see the false imitations of art; but as he had too much of the former in him, the latter could not deceive him by her false glamour, and his optimistic nature gave way a little, as he could not be pleased with seeming beauty and bliss. Although he was not in the habit of confining himself to books, in obedience to his brother's desire he began to read the first Sanskrit grammar with him. This he continued for a few days. Once when he was sitting alone in the veranda of his room, he saw a man well-versed in

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Nyaya and Mimamsa, whom he had known before, carrying something in a napkin and through familiarity he asked the pandit what he was carrying in his cloth. Being answered that it was a little rice and green banana which he had earned from the neighbouring mansion by performing the priest's function there, Sri Ramakrishna at once began to reflect, that if so much learning could bring nothing better than such a trifle, what was the necessity of taking so much trouble in getting by heart all the difficult aphorisms of grammar, logic &c., till a man becomes old ? Did not the common porter of the street earn his daily bread, although he might not know to read a single letter ? He would not have such knowledge. It was not worth a *pie* and from that moment he gave up all idea of pursuing his studies. Next day his brother asked the reason of his not studying the grammar as usual, and when he explained, Ramakumar laughed at him, thinking him a foolish young lad ; for it was, and still is, a notion amongst all learned scholars, that knowledge is merely an intellectual pastime and it is not necessary that every one should follow the teachings of the sages who want us to regard the world as false and Brahman alone as real. So it was natural for Ramakumar to take

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him to be an inexperienced boy who knew little about the world, but who would only learn from further experience. He asked him to give up all his wild views and continue his studies, but Sri Ramakrishna told him decidedly that he was not going to learn what could never take him beyond all wants, and that he would try to get such knowledge, knowing which, all his physical, mental and spiritual wants would leave him once for all. Ramakumar laughed still more, but as he was a loving and very good brother, he did not press his request very much and allowed him to have his will for sometime, believing that time itself would teach him a better lesson.

Sri Ramakrishna was now left free. He used to go occasionally to Mr. Digambar Mitra's big mansion in the neighbourhood with his brother who was honoured and patronised by Mr. Mitra and many other wealthy people of the place on account of his excellent character and profound scholarship. The sweet voice and amiable character of Sri Ramakrishna at once made him a favourite of all the members of Mr. Mitra's family, and especially the ladies who loved to hear him sing his devotional songs often and often. The spirit of Kamarpukur began to revive a little.

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There was a very wealthy lady at Janbazaar, Calcutta, named Rani Rasmani, who was famous for her keen intellect, sagacity and piety. She wanted to dedicate a temple to the Goddess Kali, so she purchased a big plot of land on the Ganges at Dakshineswar, a village about four miles north of Calcutta. Although she was born of a low caste, she desired that good Brahmanas should help her in this noble undertaking by accepting her gifts and becoming priests to the Goddess. With this intention she sent men to different centres of learning in and outside the metropolis, to ask the opinions of the learned Pandits about her project, and she was puzzled to find that each and every one of them told her that as she was a sudra lady, she could not expect good Brahmanas to partake in the intended ceremony and festival. She was really disgusted and did not know what to do. At last she came across Ramakumar and asked his opinion about it and he after deep deliberation asked her to write down the property in the name of her Guru who was a Brahmana, and all the difficulties would thus be removed. For in that case the property having belonged to a twice born, no good Brahmana should have any objection to partake in the festival. This pleased the Rani

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exceedingly and she immediately did as she was advised. The property which cost her more than twelve lakhs of rupees was written in her Guru's name.

It was on the day of the bathing festival of Sri Jagannath in the year 1853, that the inaugural ceremony began, and one of the biggest temples, which had been built on the spacious land, was formally dedicated to the Mother of the Universe, the Goddess Kali. Innumerable men and women flocked from all directions and were sumptuously entertained, but the orthodox Brahmins refrained from coming there, although there was no good reason for their behaving so except the social custom. As no other Brahmin sympathised with her, Ramakumar was requested to be the high priest to the Goddess and he readily agreed. His brother followed him on the inauguration day, and amongst all the feastings he alone remained fasting, not liking to partake of a sudra's food, and he appeased his hunger by taking a quarter anna worth of popped rice in the evening. It was as if the hereditary orthodoxy made its appearance for the first time although only to die after a while. When the ceremony was over he expressed his sorrow at his brother's accepting the service of a sudra. But

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when Ramakumar quoted several passages from the scriptures to show that he was all right, Sri Ramakrishna was perfectly satisfied, and began to take his meals there along with them.

Many Brahmins at home criticised Ramakumar for accepting the service of a sudra, and when Ramakrishna returned home after a few days, they all began to shower their invectives against the indiscreet and improper action of his brother. He heard all this, but kept silence, perfectly at peace within himself as to his brother's unimpeachable conduct. After staying for a few days at home, during which he paid a visit to his nephew, Hridaya, at Sehar, a village five miles from his own, he returned to Dakshineswar and stayed with Ramakumar.

One day he took a little clay from the bank of the holy Ganges and fashioned such a beautiful image of Siva riding on a bull out of it, that it attracted the admiration of all the people who saw it. Mathuranath Biswas, the son-in-law of Rani-Rasmani and the manager of her estate, was walking up and down the garden at the time. He also saw the beautiful image and was so much charmed by it, that he at once wanted to know who the artist was. On its being said that the younger

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brother of his high priest had done this, he at once wanted to see him, and requested Ramakumar to bring his artist brother to him.

As soon as Mathuranath saw Sri Ramakrishna he was so charmed by his sweet personality that he desired to employ him as a priest along with his brother and an opportunity soon presented itself.

By the side of Kali's temple, there is a Vishnu-mandira in the same compound and a Brahmana was employed as the worshipper of the God. Through his carelessness, he one day broke the leg of the image, and a great commotion took place throughout the temple precincts. The news also reached the Rani at Janbazaar. She was sorely displeased with the carelessness of her priest, and did not know what to do with the broken image. She asked the advice of many pandits who unanimously told her to throw it away and replace it by a new one. Sri Ramakrishna's opinion was also sought and he simply asked the Rani to enquire of the Pandits how they would advise a lady if her husband's leg got broken or fractured. Would they advise her to throw him away, or keep him under the treatment of a good doctor until he got completely cured ? Of course, the wise men had to give preference to the latter procedure, at which Sri

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Ramakrishna asked the Rani if, in worshipping the holy image, she had been worshipping her real husband, or merely an idol. The sagacious Rani at once understood the force of his argument, and asked him to cure the broken limb of her husband, having heard of him previously as a skilful natural artist. He mended the broken limb in such a way that none could detect that it had been broken at all. The Rani was very much pleased at all this, and she requested him to be employed as a permanent worshipper of the God, to which he said he would consent provided his nephew Hridaya be allowed to live with him in the temple. The Rani at once complied and Sri Ramakrishna was employed as a priest of the Vishnu temple, while Hridaya became an adorner of Kali's holy person. Within six months, however, the former was transferred to Kali's temple and Ramakumar had to take charge of Vishnumandiram. When Mother Kali was put under Sri Ramakrishna's care, a great spiritual storm was gradually beginning to gather strength within him. He was naturally fond of his Mother Goddess, and when at Kamarpukar, he had been in the habit of worshipping her with his play-fellows; that had been one of the several favourite plays of his boyhood; now he had her actually before him, as

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his own dearly beloved Eternal Mother. It was no longer a play, but a serious affair to him. His joy knew no bounds at first. Early in the morning he used to rise up from his bed, take a flower-basket in his hand, and gather the choicest flowers from the spacious garden surrounding the big temple. He would make the most beautiful garland out of them, and adorn his Beloved Mother with it. When he sat down to worship, he knew not when to stop; such was also the case, when he waved the holy light before the Goddess. To him she was not a stone image, but a living Mother, and could a loving, and dutiful child like him feel anything but intense bliss in her sweet company? He used to sing songs to her, songs that had flowed out of the pure heart of a former saintly and beloved child of Hers, Rama-Prasad, so that she might be pleased with them. Every moment of his life passed in the thought of how to please her. Sleep forsook him in the night, when his mind tried to devise the best way of worshipping his beloved One. If the day were a little hot, he would stand by Her side fanning for hours together. He used to prepare betel-leaves with finely cut nuts, in the most exquisite manner, so that his Mother might be perfectly pleased in chewing them. For the first

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few months he forgot all about himself and was filled with his Divine Mother. When he sat down to meditate upon Her, space and time were completely overlooked, and he used to lose himself in Her.

His brother Ramakumar got frightened at all this, and thought he might run mad, if he went on in this strain. So he sent him home to be married after finding out a suitable bride for him. He was duly married to a girl of five, named Srimati Saradamani Devi, and stayed in his native place for a few days, and then came back to Dakshineswar. He was at that time aged twenty-five. After his return, he wanted to commune with his Mother more deeply. For this reason he wanted an enclosed and solitary place. On the northern side of the big garden there was a vast banyan tree, covering a large plot of ground which during those days remained almost unfrequented by men, and was called *Panchavati*. He wanted to have an enclosed place near it where he could safely meditate unmolested by any, but as he was very shy he did not make his intention known to any one, although he desired it very much. He was sitting one day at this time under the shade of the big banyan tree, facing the Ganges, which was then in

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its full tide, when he saw a bundle suddenly thrown over the bank by the rushing waves. There was a gardener working near by. He asked him to see what the bundle contained and when it was untied, to his astonishment he found all the necessaries for fencing an enclosure, such as bamboo, woods of equal length, a big bundle of rope, and even a knife. He asked the gardener, who had a great regard for him, to enclose with a fence the plot he had already planted with *tulasi* and the good man readily complied with his request. Every night he used to come there to meditate and experience the transcendental conceptions of a *yogi*, as described in the Svetasvataropanishad (II, II).

" Before a man realizes Brahman he experiences these visions within himself, viz., smoke, fog, wind, fire, firefly, lightning, crystal, lunar and solar lights." Within a very short time he realised the highest perfection of Yoga by becoming one with Brahman, transcending all these visions, for nothing could be difficult for an ardent spirit like his. During this period he first saw a vision of a most beautiful girl whom he came to know as Sita, the devoted consort of Sri Ramachandra. The sweet damsel came before him smiling and asked him what he wanted, for She was ready to give him whatever

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he desired. Sri Ramakrishna asked nothing but true devotion towards Herself who was the mother of the whole universe. At this Sita was exceedingly pleased and presently merged into him. Referring to the miserable condition of his body, in latter days the great sage used to tell us that because he had first seen Sita whose whole life was almost a life of misery he also had to fare no better than She.

After this he had many visions of Gods and Goddesses, all of whom used to lose themselves in him. His daily worship of Kali used to be conducted with more fervour and dovotion during these days. He was more impatient to talk with Her, to see Her take food from his own hand. He wanted to put life into the stone Image of the Goddess and make Her move, and talk, and play with him as a living Mother, for he thought, was She not the all-powerful creator of the Universe ? Then why should She not grant him this favour ? Was it too much for Her who could create and destroy all in a moment ? Had She not previously revealed Herself to Her fortunate devotees, such as Ramaprasad and others ? Why in his case should She remain silent ? Was there any defect in his devotion towards Her ? Why did She not point it out to him then ? Thus he used to question Her,

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while streams of tears would flow from his eyes. Not being able to bear separation from Her, he would sometimes beat his head against the ground and rub his mouth upon it, till blood used to come from the wounded parts. In the madness of desperation once he snatched the sword from Her hand and wanted to kill himself with it, when the charming figure of the Divine Mother appeared before him and sweetly consoled him saying "my dear child, I will come to thee whenever thou wilt call me." At this the terrible storm within him ceased.

When his intense zeal to see his Mother made him so mad, not being able to understand the profundity of his devotion, the temple people used to tell all sorts of stories against him to the Rani and Mathuranath, both of whom had fortunately more sense to appreciate him. So the tale bearers could not injure him in any way. But he used to be so much out of himself that it was found altogether impossible for him to carry on the temple worship systematically. In going to worship the Mother, sometimes he would place the flowers upon his own head, not knowing himself to be in any way separate from Her. Sometimes realising Her to be permeating all living organisms, he would

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feed cats and crows with the offering intended for the Goddess. These were indeed acts of extreme sacrilegiousness in the eyes of superficial observers; and so Mathuranath employed Hridaya, his nephew as the priest, and allowed Sri Ramakrishna to do whatever he liked. Thus being free, Sri Ramakrishna's devotion towards the Goddess Mother increased a thousandfold. For days and nights he used to stay beyond the plane of his senses, and his loving nephew Hridaya tried his best to make him eat a few mouthfuls of food everyday. But some days he could not succeed in making him swallow even a single mouthful, so fully unconscious he used to be of his environments. Before his realization of the Divine glory, his restlessness was such as cannot be described. His brain used to burn with a peculiar kind of unbearable heat, to cool down which he used to apply the cold mud of the Ganges to his head for hours.

At this period his loving brother Ramakumar breathed his last. The second brother Rameswara was living at home to look after the domestic affairs, so Ramakrishna was left without a guardian except his faithful nephew and attendant Hridaya, who loved him with intense dovotion, followed him everywhere like a shadow and but for whom the

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preservation of his body would have been impossible. This we have heard from his own mouth. So can we be too grateful to Hridaya who served him with unstinted devotion for thirty years ?

That Sri Ramakrishna always required a man to look after and watch him, can be easily gathered from the facts already stated. He was almost wholly careless of his body, and unconscious of his environment. Frequently he used to fall into trances when he would be totally unconscious, even of his body. Hence Hridaya used to look after him always.

At this time he was attacked with dyspepsia and therefore went to his native place for a change, accompanied by his devoted nephew. His former playmates lost in him the old jolly friend, and most of them took him to be mad, as he became very much reserved, and loved to frequent the cremation ground. But soon he got cured of his dyspepsia and came back to Dakshineswar. He now wanted to try the means prescribed in the Tantras, through proper forms for the attainment of the favour already received from his Divine Mother. A middle-aged Brahmin lady, well-versed in all the Puranas and Tantras, came at this time to the place and seeing Sri Ramakrishna, at once understood his exalted

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spiritual state and said that she had at last found out the man for whom she had been searching a long while. She had learned from some supernatural source that three great souls would make their appearance in Bengal at that time. She had found out the two whom she had been destined to serve, and the third she had now got in Sri Ramakrishna.

He too was very happy in getting her opportune help, for she not only dispersed the anxiety created in his mind by people who took him to be mad, but helped him considerably in his intended project to try Tantrica means for the realization of his goal. He went through many difficult processes very successfully through the help of this wonderful lady, and by the time he was perfect master of the Tantras, she disappeared.

It is a curious thing to note that whenever he wanted to try any of the several paths leading to Truth, he always used to get an expert guide whose unexpected and well-timed arrival made all things very easy for him; and no path, however difficult, would take more than three days for him to travel through. When he was trying the Tantra paths many eminent followers of Tantra used to come to him of their own accord. During this period he

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was once attacked with an insatiable hunger, and the wonderful Brahmana lady cured him of it by always keeping before him large quantities of various kinds of food, the constant sight of which gradually cured him of his unnatural appetite. At one time his body seemed to him to be merged in Divine glory, and such was the beauty of his person then, that people used to regard him with wonder.

When he finished the Tantrica paths, another wave rose in his mind which made him restless for realising Sri Ramachandra and enjoying His Divine beauty. A Sanyasi, who was a devoted worshipper of Sri Rama, came at this time and set him in the path. Sri Ramakrishna realized this ideal by seeing the object of his intense devotion. The Sanyasin used to worship an image of baby Rama he had with him. He presented this to his glorious disciple who saw in It the living God, and daily adored and worshipped It with so much fervour that he could never part with It, carrying It always with him wherever he went. He used to regard It as his darling, and himself as Kausalya; and such was the intensity of his feeling, that he was always living and moving in company with his beloved.

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Once Mathuranath was insisting upon God's inability to violate or withstand the natural laws before Him, to which Sri Ramakrishna objected and said that, being all-powerful, God could do whatever he liked. Mathura was not convinced, but rather argued that God could never produce two kinds of flowers in a single plant. For some business, Sri Ramakrishna went out for a while. Coming back he asked Mathura to follow him, who, doing so, was brought before a flower plant on one branch of which there were two flowers of different sorts. Mathura was then convinced. This and many other wonderful incidents in connection with Sri Ramakrishna, made Mathuranath his ardent devotee and follower. For his comforts he never hesitated to spend any amount of money. He regarded him as his God. Rani Rasmani's devotion towards him was also very intense. She examined him in several ways, and was thoroughly convinced of his divine nature.

After this, Sri Ramakrishna wanted to realize the goal of a monistic Vedantin, and a Sanyasin named Tota-puri, opportunely came at the time to help him, sent as it were, by some unseen power. Guided by him, he was able to realize in three days the highest *Samadhi*, in which all idea of duality

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was lost. Tota-puri was astonished to see him realize within so short a period the most exalted state of superconsciousness which is altogether inaccessible to most men, and which took him forty years to attain. He therefore could not help regarding him as an extraordinary being; and although he had come there to stay only for three days, as he was on his way to Ganga-Sagar, he remained for eleven months with his disciple.

During this period Sri Ramakrishna used to live nearly always in that transcendental plane of superconsciousness, completely separating himself from his body, which on account of this appeared nothing better than a dead one, so much so, that even birds used to come and sit upon it to pick up the grains of rice from the head where they had been put in while offering worship to the Highest Self. His hair became matted. He was irregular in his bath and forgetful of his environments the greater portion of the time.

Thus his frequent trances began to increase in their duration, so that at last he could not come down to the plane of his five senses. Hridaya was unable to succeed in making him eat anything for days and days together, and everyone was naturally anxious for his life. Most people gave him up for

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lost. Another Sanyasin made his appearance at this crisis. He at once found him out to be in the highest *Samadhi*, and being a Yogi himself, he knew how to bring him down. The treatment, which he thought would cure him, was of a very rude character, for it consisted in dealing heavy blows upon his person by means of a short and thick club. The Sanyasin without any delay, proceeded to his business and began to strike him heavily with the club, and excessive physical pain, thus created, brought him down to semi-consciousness for a while, when a little food used to be forced into his mouth. Sometimes no amount of beating would bring him back to consciousness. In this way it went on for some months, and the Sanyasin too was almost becoming hopeless when to relieve his anxiety and that of all his friends, as well as for the good fortune of posterity, his body was spared, as it were, by an attack of a very acute kind of his old dyspepsia, which brought down the mind to his body.

When he was brought back to his senses and his disease had left him, another wave began to disturb his mind. He became restless for Sri Krishna. Sometimes like Yasoda he would anxiously wait for his darling with butter in his hand,

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sometimes he would look towards Him as his beloved companion and friend, like the shepherd boys of Gokula, and would be restless for his company, sometimes he would regard himself as a shepherd girl, and would anxiously wait for the much-longed-for union with the beautiful swain of Brindabana, the abode of all charm, all beauty, and all perfection, till in the intensity of his fervour and devotion, he at last brought the Infinite Lord of the universe before him in the most charming person of sweet Sri Krishna. This incident reminds us of his beautiful saying wherein he tells that as formless water can be frozen and thus given a shape by the application of intense cold, similarly the formless and Infinite God of the Universe can be condensed and given a shape through the intense devotion of a true lover.

During this period of his life many Vaishnava saints used to come to him to help him on, and would be helped instead. He now found that all the various paths described in the Hindu scriptures, although they might sometimes appear as diametrically opposite, still ultimately led to the same goal. He did not rest satisfied even here; he wanted to see whether other religions of the world, such as Mahomedanism and Christianity, were different

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paths or not. So he first tried the former with the help of a Mahomedan teacher residing in Dumdum. He gave up going to Kali's temple, and behaved altogether like an Islamite, and at last he found that out to be as good a path to realize the truth as others he had previously tried. Once, as he was walking in an adjacent garden belonging to a wealthy gentleman of Calcutta, named Babu Yadunath Mullik, he saw that a tall airy figure was approaching him, and he at once knew Him to be Jesus, who came and was merged in him, making him transcend all his senses and taking him to the same goal at which all other religions aim. Thus he was able to know, beyond all doubt, that there were as many paths as there were religions. As one water, although it may be termed differently by different people, such as *jal, pani, tannir, water, aqua, etc.*, equally slakes the thirst of all, similarly one God, although He is differently viewed by the different nations of the world, equally fulfills the desires of all.

All his struggles were now ended. He had realized his goal. At this time his wife had been staying in Dakshineswar, and having attained maidenhood it was the duty of Sri Ramakrishna to accept her as his wife according to the law; but instead of

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doing that he one day went to her, and worshipped her with flowers and incense, regarding her as the Mother of the Universe. Srimati Saradadevi looked upon him as her child and thenceforward began to regard him as more than divine. The sage now started for his native place with Hridaya. This time he was neither reserved nor fond of seclusion. The old jollity had again come back to him. His friends began to flock round him with all of whom he talked kindly and with great joyfulness of spirit. But his friends could not regard him as their old Gadadhara, for with all his playfulness, there was a certain solemnity about him which awed and kept them at a respectful distance.

After a few days he returned from Kamarpukur to the temple of Kali. At that time the wife of Mathuranath was seriously ill. The best physicians of the metropolis had given her up for lost. Mathuranath was distressed, and when he heard that his Baba (the name by which Mathuranath called Sri Ramakrishna) had returned, without any delay he came from Janbazaar to Dakshineswar to pay his respects to him. Sri Ramakrishna knew the trouble of his heart, and so told him kindly not to be frightened by what doctors had told, for his wife would be cured shortly. Mathura was exceedingly glad at

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this, for he had infinite faith in the words of his Guru and his joy knew no bounds when within a very few days his wife recovered.

During this period of his life Sri Ramakrishna used to spend most of his days with Mathura in his Janbazaar house. Both husband and wife regarded him as their God. One day the wife expressed her intention of making pilgrimages to all the holy places of Northern India, and Mathura asked the opinion of his master, who readily consented. When Mathura humbly asked him to accompany them, he gave his consent to that. At this he ordered all his servants to make the necessary preparations for the journey.

Within a very few days the big party started on pilgrimage. A railway carriage was especially reserved for Sri Ramakrishna. Hridaya followed him to take care of his person. They soon reached Benares. After paying his respects to Sri Visvanath, Sri Ramakrishna went to visit Srimat Trailinga Swami, the famous *mauni* or silent sanyasin who disappeared a few years ago. When the Swami saw the sage of Dakshineswar, he motioned to him to sit down, and presented him his snuff box, thereby indicating his great regard for him. Sri Ramakrishna asked him whether God is one or many to which

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the Swami replied assuming the posture of meditation, and raising one finger, thereby indicating that when a man is silent and has no concern with the world, there is only one God to him. Then putting his fingers upon his mouth, and pointing in all directions he thereby implied that when a man talks and is thus concerned with the world, many must be his Gods.

Thence the party went to Allahabad. There Swami Dayananda Saraswati met him. This was in the year 1869, the year of Kumbha, when Sri Ramakrishna was thirty-six years of age. The Swami opened a little discussion in which he wanted to establish that God would not have any form, which his opponent strongly denied. At last Dayananda fell down at his feet, seeing some divine manifestation in him.

The party after a few days started for Brindaban. Here Sri Ramakrishna used to fall into trances frequently. He had now come to real Brindabanam, every grain of dust in which had been hallowed by the holy feet of Sri Krishna and the shepherd girls. He often used to roll in the dust, in order to purify himself and then he would be at once transported into the charming circle of Sri Krishna and his shepherd boys and girls whom he would enjoy

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and play with for some time and then come back to his body. There was at the time a great lady saint named Gangamata at Brindabanam. She regarded herself as one of Sri Krishna's shepherd girls, and it is said that she obtained the much-longed-for object of her devotion after a great struggle. When Sri Ramakrishna went to her hermitage to pay his respects, she at once accosted him as Dulali, meaning Radha, the chief of the shepherd girls. She took him to be a woman disguised in the body of man and did not feel any shame before him. She was so very pleased with his company, that she did not want to part with him. In the meantime, his trances were so very frequent that Mathuranath thought, unless he were soon removed from Brindabanam, he might go out of his body once for all. So he hastened to start back for Calcutta.

On their way back to the metropolis the train halted near Vaidyanath for a while. There Sri Ramakrishna was very much affected by the sight of many poor, emaciated human figures, and told Mathuranath that unless he gave them food and clothing he could not leave that place. There was nothing which the noble-minded son-in-law of Rani Rasmani could not do for him. With all his party he got down there, and ordered food to be prepared

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and served to as many poor people as could be found. Thousands and thousands of these poor wretches began to flock from the surrounding countries hearing through tom-tom, about it. When Sri Ramakrishna saw that all the poor people had been given food and clothing, he was perfectly satisfied. Then the party came back to Calcutta. The whole trip cost Mathura eighty thousand rupees (Rs. 80,000).

After coming back to Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna used to go to pay his respects to such people as were revered and honoured by many for their noble and unselfish character; for he believed them to have a little of divinity in them, and so by honouring and worshipping them, he virtually honoured and worshipped God. From his boyhood he had a taste for hearing religious plays, and making *Bhajanam*; so invited or uninvited, he used to go and grace such gatherings by his holy presence. There was a great Vaishnava saint, named Bhagavandas, living at Kalna. He went with Mathuranath to see him. He heard from many people about the religious fervour of Babu Kesab-chandra Sen and naturally wanted to see him, so one day, accompanied by Hridaya, he went to visit him in a certain garden at Belgachia, two miles

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east of Dakshineswar. Keshab had come there with his party for a picnic. After having taken their meals, they were resting, when Sri Ramakrishna made his appearance. As soon as he saw the leader of the Brahmo Samaj, he fell into a semi-conscious state, which he always used to have when he came in contact, for the first time, with a man of exalted character. After looking at him for a few seconds he smiled and said "Friend, I see your tail has dropped down." All except Keshab, hearing this uncalled-for and incoherent remark from the stranger, took him to be a mad cap and laughed at him. But Keshab checked them and with true humility, which was natural to him, asked Sri Ramakrishna what he meant by his remarks. The sage replied "As when tadpoles drop their tail then alone they become amphibious, *i.e.*, can live both on land and in water, similarly you have dropped the tail of ignorance and that is the reason why you can live both in and out of the world." Hearing this all admired him and felt ashamed of their former rashness. From that time forward Keshab became very much attached to him. He paid a return visit one day to Dakshineswar and Sri Ramakrishna accorded him a very loving reception. Gradually Keshab's reverence towards him increas-

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ed so much that he would not sit before him on any seat, but kept kneeling down for hours and hours together hearing the sweet and ennobling words flowing out of his holy mouth like nectar.

It was Keshab that first published his name in his paper called "The New Dispensation." The English-knowing public thus came to know about him, and high officials, clerks and students began to flock round him. When Sri Ramakrishna heard that Mr. Sen had published his name in the newspapers he was very much displeased, for he did not care to have any name or fame for himself. He used to say to his Divine Mother, "Mother, let all name and fame be Keshab's, but let my intense devotion always flow towards Thee."

Many young students from schools and colleges, reading his name in the paper went to see him, and he always used to talk kindly with them. He especially loved young boys, for he said, "As a fruit that has not been pecked by crows or other birds is the best offering for the Gods, similarly the young men whom the ravens of sensuality and worldliness have not yet preyed upon, are more fit to be offered to God than others. Religion should be practised even from boyhood, for a tender branch can be

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bent in any direction, but such is not the case with a strong and grown-up one."

Among the students who flocked round him he liked Narendranath most of all, for he saw in him the future great man, and so accorded him the highest seat; this student is now known as the great world-honoured Swami Vivekananda. Sri Ramakrishna had the peculiar power of knowing everything about a man at first sight. According to him very few people are destined to realise true religion in this life. Unless the desire for sensual enjoyment completely leaves a man, which can only be possible to him if he has been satiated with all such contact-born pleasures in his previous births, he is not qualified to realise the grandeur of truth. So, although innumerable boys used to come to him, he selected only a very few and initiated them into the mysteries of higher religion, which will always remain as night to the worldly-minded.

He used to instruct his disciples according to their different qualifications and tendencies. Some he would ask to meditate upon God without any form, some he would tell to have strong devotion towards God with form, such as Siva, Vishnu, Krishna, etc., as to him all religions of the world were different paths leading to the same goal, God,

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who may be known differently by different people, as God, *Allah, Jehoovah, Iswara,* etc. He always used to advise the follower of every religion to stick to his particular path. As an illustration he used to give this parable : Once upon a time a man wanted to sink a well and someone advised him to dig in a certain spot, and he did so. But after sinking fifteen cubits, when he found no water coming out, he got disgusted. In the meantime another man came and laughing at his foolish attempt advised him to dig in another spot which he knew to be the best. So the man went and resumed his labour there. This time he went down twenty cubits, but no water was found. A third man came and asked him to try in another and better place which he would point out to him. He followed and a certain spot was shown to him. He went on sinking and sinking till thirty cubits were reached and in utter disgust he was going to give up the task, when a fourth man came up to him, smiling sweetly and said, "My child, you have laboured much indeed, but being misdirected all these labours have been of no use to you. Very well, kindly follow me, and I will take you to a spot where if you only touch your spade to the ground, water will flow out in torrents." The temptation was too much for him and so he followed

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this fourth man and did according to his advice. He went on digging expecting every moment the gushing out of water, till he patiently sank twenty cubits, but alas! no water came. Then utterly discouraged he gave up the task altogether. By this time he has sunk eighty-five cubits. But if he had had the patience and perseverance to sink half the number of cubits in one place, he would surely have been successful. Similarly, men who cannot stick to their own religion, and always hastily court one religion after another, at last turn out to be atheists in their old age, giving up religion altogether.

Every religion is perfect in itself. Therefore a man should stick to the religion in which he is born, without hating the votaries of other religions, deeming them to be destined to go to hell, while he alone being the favoured child of God is intended for Heaven. As an illustration to this he used to tell us the parable of a daughter-in-law. As in a household the good daughter-in-law honours and respects her father-in-law, mother-in-law, her own father and mother, and loves her relatives and friends, but her especial love flows freely towards her husband, with whom alone she shares her bed, similarly a man should honour and respect other

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religions, but stick to and practise his own religion with chastity of spirit.

The latter portion of Sri Ramakrishna's life was spent in imparting these noble truths with whomsoever he used to come in contact. He has now allotted this task to his disciples, the chief among whom, the Swami Vivekananda, is nobly carrying out his Master's behest preaching his gospel of universal tolerance and sympathy to all men and women of the world. This is the grand mission which we have brought from him, my dear friends, for your acceptance, and salvation.

I need not dwell upon the latter portion of Sri Ramakrishna's divine life. I hope I have sufficiently brought him before you to give you a rough view of the Divine Man, as well as the universal doctrine which he came to preach. According to him we must combine orthodoxy with liberalism. The spirit of the age is such as refuses to think that Truth can be the monopoly of a single individual or nation. Science has taught us this grandest lesson, and so in Sri Ramakrishna we see the marriage of religion with science.

And this is exactly the spirit of Hinduism or the religion eternal, one of whose grandest exponents sang :—

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"Whoever comes to take refuge in me through whatever path, I exactly suit myself to his requirements. All people follow my path alone, O, Partha."

This universal doctrine is exactly compatible with the infinite nature of the Lord of the Universe. So bigotry, narrow-mindedness, and fanaticism have nothing to do with true religion. Let the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna be upon all of us on this auspicious day to enable us to realise the Truth Eternal by saving us from the foul clutch of narrowness and bigotry. Let us all profit by the noble example of his glorious life, through His grace.

Sri Ramakrishna represents Truth, and as Truth is not bound in time and space, so the great Saint of the modern age is not limited temporally or spacially. His life has now only begun, and it is destined to shine through all men and women of the world in the near future, when as the Swami Vivekananda says, on the banners of all religions will be written, "Help, and not Fight, Assimilation and not Destruction, Harmony and Peace and not Dissension," when all men and women will learn to regard one another as brothers and sisters, and thus live harmoniously allowing everyone to view,

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worship, and love the Infinite God of all, according to his own capacity and choice. Let us all struggle our best to bring about the existence of such a blessed time, as soon as possible, and make Sri Ramakrishna shine in all in his perfect glory.

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